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AUTHOR Foster, Carl; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Based on recommendations of a District Attendance Task Force, in 1980 the Ganado School District (a Navajo Reservation District) formulated an Attendance Improvement Plan which decreased the primary school's absentee rate 37% over previous years and which dramatically increased Friday attendance. The primary school targeted "high risk" chronic non-attenders and interviewed those students and their parents to determine their perception of the relative importance of attending school and to establish goals and methods that would lead to increased student attendance. To ensure that all students were enrolled, a committee of students, staff, and teachers was formed. The committee developed, instituted, and monitored an incentive program that recognized individuals and/or a class for outstanding attendance. Rewards consisted of free books for perfect individual attendance in a grading quarter and of movies and/or parties for the class with the best monthly attendance. To improve Friday attendance, the class with the highest weekly attendance was allowed to raise the flag the following week. Data indicated that the processes used were valid for increasing attendance. (CM)

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Increasing Reservation Attendance: Ganado's Approach

Carl Foster
Northern Arizona University

Sigmund Boloz
Ganado Public School District

Joseph E. Shaffer III
Northern Arizona University

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Introduction

Arizona school districts receive funding in accordance with a legislatively established numerical formula based upon enrollment. Throughout the academic year attendance is monitored and monies are adjusted in accordance with the number of students enrolled and in attendance. Because of this procedure, administrators spend great amounts of time keeping enrollment at its maximum. Each district has implemented programs that minimize absenteeism, because if enrollment drops significantly, the district's practices are curtailed.

Historically the Arizona Navajo public schools have wrestled more with the problem of enrollment than with any other. Many variables, including inadequate roads, the extensive size of the geographic area, etc., appear to affect the enrollment with the net result of high absenteeism. Plans have been made to redress this enrollment crisis, with few districts successfully maximizing enrollment. The Ganado School District, in its attempts to solve this problem, has formulated what appears to be a highly successful plan that significantly reduces absenteeism. An Attendance Improvement Plan has been implemented at the primary school with some encouraging and surprising results. That data show that primary student enrollment is thirty seven percent (37%) higher this year than over a similar two month period last year.

The Plan

During the first quarter of the 1980-1981 academic year, the Ganado District had a fifteen percent (15%) increase in absentees compared with figures compiled during the first quarter of the 1979-1980 academic year. With this increase in absenteeism in mind, a District Attendance Task Force was formed to study the problem and to recommend possible solutions. For the remainder of the first quarter the Task Force compiled data in the following areas: (1) previous attendance frequencies (including monthly and yearly trends by grade and school); (2) reasons given by students for absences; and (3) "high risk" chronic non-attenders.

Based on the data collected, the Task Force recommended that: (1) identified high risk students and their parents be interviewed to determine their perception of the relative importance of attending school; (2) positive programming be implemented in grades and/or schools where attendance has been poor; and (3) a district-wide effort be undertaken to reduce those factors listed by students that contributed to frequent absenteeism. At the request of the Task Force, high risk primary grade students and their parents were interviewed to establish goals and methods that would lead to increased student attendance.

In October the primary school principal took further steps to redress absenteeism. Student members of the Library/Activity Club met with selected staff and teachers. A program of incentives was developed to recognize individuals and/or a class for outstanding attendance. Rewards ranged from presenting the students with

free books (for those who had perfect attendance in a grading quarter), to movies and/or parties for the class with the best monthly attendance. As the school's attendance incentive program manifested itself, the principal observed that enrollment and attendance was high every day except Friday. Consequently, the Library/Activity Club took steps to improve Friday attendance by presenting the class that had the best weekly attendance with the highly coveted task of raising the flag the following week.

Conclusion

Through increased attention to attendance, the primary school's absentee rate has decreased thirty seven percent (37%) over previous years, with Friday attendance rising dramatically. Of the three grades housed, the second grade showed the most impressive results with an enrollment of ninety seven percent (97%) daily. Not all of the results are in, but the data compiled seem to indicate that the Ganado District has instituted workable procedures that significantly pares absenteeism. Like most reservation districts, Ganado is attempting to maximize enrollment. Through the Attendance Task Force, an Attendance Improvement Plan has been formulated and is being tested at the primary school. At the recommendation of the Task Force, the primary school targeted high risk students and is working on procedures that promote regular attendance. To ensure that all students are enrolled, a committee comprised of students, staff and teachers was formed. This committee met on a regular basis with each member having an equal impact upon the committee's

decisions. From these meetings, incentives were developed, instituted and monitored.

The committee process coupled with the interviewing and incentives are the strengths of the district's Attendance Plan. Presently the data at the primary school show that these processes are valid and can be utilized by the other district schools to improve their enrollment. As the year continues to bear out the efforts of the Task Force, adjustments will be made district-wide, with working capital more accurately predicted.